From: mitchell@deckard1.mcmurdo.gov@inetgw
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 12/15/01 2:21pm
Subject: Break the application lock

Microsoft's lock on the computer industry stems from its proprietary file formats. In short, everyone runs Word because the only way to share a document is by using the same application to read/write it. Other programs _try_ to read/write .doc files, but invariably they fail in some way or another. As a result, to be fully compatible, you must use Word as well, because that is what everyone else using.

And this isn't just Word, but all the file types; spreadsheets, presentations (powerpoint), etc.

IF the format of these files were openly published, then any software company could write programs that read and wrote to those specifications. Any company then has the chance to write the next "killer word processor/spreadsheet/etc" based on the functionality and user-interface of their program. They are not locked out because it isn't compatible with whatever program currently has the greatest user-base.

As an example of this in other technologies; anyone can make a tv because the broadcast format is well documented and it will work with everyone else's. We aren't tied to choosing a CBS tv because we want to watch a few CBS shows.

Likewise, we are not tied to using MCI (in the telephone industry) because that is what our friends/work/etc uses. We are free to choose our own telephone company and can talk with anyone else regardless of what telephone company they use.

In the same goal as standards in other communication areas, file formats should also be standardized. That would allow people to choose what company/program they want to use based on their own preferences, not because they have to conform to what everyone else uses.

Any company selling a "communications" program (that is what documents, spreadsheets, presentations, etc, programs are, they communicate ideas to other people) must conform to a standardized way of exchanging that information. As changes are needed to the standards, those changes must be at the very least, well publicized, and ideally would be reviewed and incorporated into the standards such that everyone has equal access to the new extensions.

With this solution adopted, it allows Microsoft to succeed
or fail based on the quality of their own products and
allows other companies to enter the market and compete
equally. Further more, Microsoft is then not being
"penalized" by the government for being successful,
as the very staunch Microsoft supporters view it.

Sincerely,
Richard

---------------------------+-----------------------------------
Richard Mitchell | Airborne Oceanographic Lidar
mitchell@aol.wff.nasa.gov | Laboratory
mitchell@osb.wff.nasa.gov |(shining a little light on the world)